Three generations wiped out by Hamas in Kibbutz Be’eri

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A 73-year-old grandmother, her 43-year-old son and barely 10-month granddaughter. Three generations of one Israeli family brutally murdered by Hamas terrorists on Oct. 7 were laid to rest Sunday side by side, the infant sharing the same coffin as her father.

In ceremonies across the country, a nation in mourning was burying its dead from the worst assault on Israel in half a century, and the most deadly one-day attack on the Jewish people since the Holocaust. In many cases, the cemeteries were only temporary resting places, as ongoing fighting with Hamas made burial in their home communities impossible. On Sunday alone, there were 17 funerals for residents of a single kibbutz.

**A national nightmare**

Sandra and Ohad Cohen together with their three children, ages 9, 3 and 10 months, were awakened on Saturday, Oct. 7 in their home in Kibbutz Be’eri by the sirens warning of incoming missiles from the Hamas-run Gaza Strip. Like millions of other Israelis, they rushed into their safe room to take cover.

The rockets were just the beginning of a national nightmare. Though the Cohens didn’t know it, thousands of Hamas terrorists had broken through the Gaza security fence in multiple locations and were converging on more than two dozen locations in southern Israel.

From their sealed room, they heard the attackers shouting “get out, get out” in English as they broke into their home, Ohad Cohen’s cousin Shir Druker, 42,of Tel Aviv, recounted on Sunday ahead of the funeral procession.

He began frantically messaging his brother and friends for help.

“Save us,” he pleaded in a Whatsapp message sent at 11:29 a.m. “Where is the army?”

“Are you at home?” his friend asked. “At home, locked in the safe room,” Cohen answered, followed by, “There is no army here.”

Both he and his brother had already lost contact with their mother, Yona Cohen, who lived at the edge of the kibbutz, and whose house, it would later emerge, had already been overtaken by the attackers.

“Take care of yourself,” his friend texted back at 11:31. “We are pressuring the army [to get there].”

“They are massacring residents,” Cohen replied at 11:47, followed by “they are burning homes” and “they are breaking into safe rooms” a minute later.

“They are breaking into my safe room. Save us,” was his last message, at 12:49 p.m.

**Mass murder**

In those terrifying last moments, the family huddled together in their safe room as terrorists shot at the door, killing their 10-month-old daughter, Mila. Her nine-year-old brother was grazed in the head by shrapnel, and the three-year old began vomiting, his cousin recounted. They put the baby on the rug in the safe room.

“He said they were going to die either way and better to die outside than inside,” said Druker. In a fateful decision, Cohen opened the window of the safe room to let fresh air in and went out to the porch, only to be captured and bound by the terrorists, and then shot dead.

The terrorists took the mother, the two remaining kids, along with an elderly woman in a wheelchair and her Filipino caretaker Gracie, and started to walk them to the kibbutz gate, she said.

Suddenly, Israeli security forces appeared and the old woman shouted “soldiers, soldiers!” In the ensuing shootout Sandra Cohen was hit four times in the lung and once each in the arm and leg, but called on her two kids to escape together to a neighboring house. The nine-year-old also wheeled the elderly woman into the house; her caretaker was taken captive by the terrorists.

Later they would find the bound body of the grandmother at her home, shot dead.

**Temporary resting place**

On an unseasonably warm and sunny late October afternoon, the two coffins, draped with Israeli flags and covered with bouquets and wreaths, moved slowly along the processions of hundreds of mourners at the Yarkon cemetery near the central Israeli city of Petah Tikva. Minutes before, another bereaved family had just recited eulogies for their dead.

This well-kept cemetery with its towering trees was to be only a temporary resting place until reburial was possible at the kibbutz, which is currently vacated and a closed military zone amid the war against Hamas in nearby Gaza. Before the ceremony got underway, an announcement was made that in the event of a rocket attack during the funeral, mourners were to lay on the ground and cover their heads in keeping with the instructions of the Israel Defense Forces’ Homefront Command.

Among the crowd of mourners was 79-year old Yitzhak Miles, whose 81-year-old brother, Albert Ablume Miles, was murdered in the very same kibbutz—an estimated 10% of Be’eri’s 1,100 residents were killed and an equal number kidnapped—but who had not been buried yet.

“I’m trembling all over,” he said, recounting how his brother, who moved to the kibbutz at age 13, had bled to death from gunshot wounds during the initial attacks, before medics could arrive. Although he did not know the Cohen family, he said he felt a need to be connected with members of his brother’s community.

“I live not far from here and heard that they were from the kibbutz so I wanted to come,” he said.

Amid a sea of tears, Israeli singer Ehud Banai sang two heart-wrenching songs as Sandra Cohen, who saved her remaining children, looked on from a wheelchair surrounded by loved ones. Family and friends delivered three eulogies—one each for the grandmother, son and grandchild.

One recalled the matriarch’s words: “You once told me, ‘If I die, it will be here in my house and not in any other place.’”